



# **Maryland Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant Program Final Report Grant Agreement 12-25-G-0529 FY 2006 - 2007**

## **Challenge**

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Maryland farmers face increasing pressures threatening their future viability. In one of the nation's most populated states, Maryland producers confront fragmentation of farmland, high land prices, foreign competition, difficulty gaining access to markets, and regulations designed to reduce agriculture's impact on the Chesapeake Bay. Maryland's farmers have identified improved promotion of Maryland products to local consumers as a top priority for the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA). This directive has come at the same time as University of Baltimore surveys of Maryland households indicate seventy-seven percent would be more likely to purchase produce identified as Maryland-grown. In state where agriculture is dominated by poultry production and where many acres are devoted to commodity grain and soybeans, connecting the consumer to the farmer is an ongoing challenge. Maryland's specialty crop producers have limited funds for marketing and promotion. To facilitate the connection, MDA created the "Maryland's Best" program to enable producers to capitalize on the consumer's preference for Maryland-grown crops.

## **Projects and Goals**

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MDA received \$111,602 from the USDA's Specialty Crop Block Grant program to increase consumer and buyer awareness, and sales of Maryland's specialty crops through the improvement of the Maryland's Best logo, website, and "buy local" promotion campaign.

MDA's retail and wholesale promotion strategy was to increase consumer awareness of product sources, drive customers to Maryland's Best website and increase producer sales. MDA worked to leverage the demand for local through media promotions including press releases and paid advertising. Advertising was focused on a target audience of those who make food purchases and are more highly educated with more income. Advertising ran on radio (primarily smooth jazz, rock and public broadcasting) and print. The promotional program also included web coupons, recipes, producer profiles, point of purchase materials for grocery stores, and events such as contests or festivals.

## **Results**

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### Survey

Maryland Department of Agriculture worked with the University of Baltimore's Schaefer Center for Public Policy to survey the public's perception of locally grown products. In 2006, more than half of the survey participants would more likely purchase products identified as Maryland grown. In the 2008 report, 78 percent of Marylanders say they more likely to purchase produce identified as

Maryland grown. Forty-eight percent say they are willing to pay more for local produce; 6 percent are willing to pay more than 20 percent above retail.

#### Materials

- MDA created ad message for Maryland's Best – "Good for You, Good for Maryland."
- MDA modified Maryland's Best logo to make it more identifiable in the market place.
- MDA created new Maryland's Best display.
- MDA created Point of Sale materials and brochure.

#### Meetings

- As part of the promotion of Maryland's Best, MDA hosted three buyer-grower meetings in the winter of 2008 with more than 200 participants, including buyers from grocery store chains, universities, and brokers, including Whole Foods, Wegmans, Safeway, Weiss, Giant, Aramark, Albertsons, Hearn Kirkwood, Lancaster Foods, and others. Producers reported sales as a direct result of the meetings. MDA also targeted chain store buyers with monthly updates on Maryland's Best promotions.
- MDA attended Produce Marketing Association's trade show with watermelon and apple producers. Contacts for specialty crop producers were established with lead produce buyers from Wal-Mart, Acme and Wegman's.

#### Targeted Promotions

MDA's promotions connected Marylanders with community-supported agriculture operations (CSA's), berry producers, watermelon growers, apple producers, Christmas tree growers, nursery and greenhouse operations as part of the strategy to promote specialty crops and stimulate the demand for local agricultural products. MDA also focused promotions on farm stands and farmers markets during the summer months with its "Reach the Beach" campaign. Maryland's Governor Martin O'Malley endorsed the, "Buy Local" campaign and encouraged Marylander's to eat one local product per day for a week.

#### *Berries*

Maryland farms harvested more than 400 acres of strawberries valued at \$2 million in 2006. The strawberry season in Maryland is quick and lasts for about a month. Promotions were targeted to direct consumers to buy fresh, local, Maryland strawberries at farmers' markets, pick-your-own operations, farm stands, and grocery stores. Various strawberry farms throughout Maryland offered coupons on the Maryland's Best Web site for 10 percent off consumers' purchases.

#### *Reach the Beach*

Nearly half a million people travel through Maryland's Eastern Shore to the ocean beaches each weekend during the summer season. The "Shore" is known for its agriculture lands and idyllic settings. MDA created a "Reach the Beach" campaign to highlight some of Maryland's delicious fruits and vegetables available directly from farmers at farm stands and farmers markets along the route to the beach.

#### *Buy Local Challenge*

Maryland's Governor Martin O'Malley designated July 19-27 as "Buy Local Week" in Maryland to raise awareness about the benefits of local farms and food and make the use of fresh, local products more familiar and more frequent to consumers. Governor O'Malley also challenged all Marylanders

to include at least one locally-grown item in their meals each day during the week. Governor O'Malley encouraged Marylanders to visit one of the 84 farmers' markets in Maryland, pick-your-own operations, roadside farm stands, and on-farm markets. "Maryland farmers produce some of the best fruits, vegetables, meats, and cheeses available and I ask each Marylander to join us as we try to incorporate at least one local product into our meals each day next week," said Governor O'Malley. "Including local, seasonal foods in our meals helps our farmers and is beneficial in so many ways to the health of our families, environment, economy, and food security. Buying local not only means fresher, more nutritious and better-tasting food, it helps to keep farmland open and productive, strengthens our rural economies, and connects us to the source of our food."

### *Watermelons*

The Delmarva Peninsula is home to a great climate and soils for growing great-tasting watermelons. Each year, from July to September, Maryland and Delaware watermelon growers produce more than 211 million pounds of watermelons. This results in more than \$20 million in sales for the states farmers.

In the summer of 2007 and 2008, MDA worked with Mar-Del Watermelon Association to increase public awareness and sales of watermelons with branding, promotion, and special events to promote the Mar-Delicious brand. The MAR-DELicious Watermelon Promotion included participation from a number of retailers in the region including Acme, Costco, Food Lion, Giant, Harris Teeter, Mars, Safeway, Sam's Club, SUPERVALU, Ukrop's, Wal-Mart, Wegmans, Weis and Whole Foods. According to the National Watermelon Association, sales of watermelons in this region increased nearly 14 % in 2008 which was one of the largest increases in the U.S.

### *Nursery and Greenhouse*

Maryland has many local producers of ornamental plants. The nursery and greenhouse sector produces more than \$560 million and delivers more than \$1 billion in economic impact from gross sales. MDA worked with the Maryland Nursery and Landscape Association to help increase Maryland horticultural sales by encouraging customers to buy Maryland-grown plants.

### *Apples*

The state's apple production in 2006 totaled 34 million pounds with a value of \$6.8 million dollars according to the Maryland Office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service. MDA worked with the Maryland Apple Promotion Board to increase Maryland apple sales by encouraging customers to visit Maryland orchards or buy local at the grocery. The message was simple – "It's good for you, and good for Maryland." Promotion strategies also included 20% off coupon during a targeted week at a Maryland apple producer.

### *Christmas Trees*

Paid print advertising encouraged Marylanders to seek out Maryland-grown Christmas trees. The Maryland's Best Web site promoted Christmas trees and allowed consumers to obtain contact information and local Christmas tree growers nearest them.

### *Community-Supported Agriculture*

A small segment of agriculture in Maryland, but one most-suited to tapping the demand for local food, CSAs were promoted through press releases and the Maryland's Best Web site.

### *Farm Wineries*

Maryland farm wineries and vineyards were promoted through advertising and the Maryland's Best Web site to coincide with spring. Farm wine production is a small, but quickly growing segment of specialty crop agriculture in Maryland.

### Sound Books

MDA worked with a professional photographer to create a "Sound Book." A Sound Book brings the story of Maryland's farmers to the consumer; it's a photographic slideshow with narration from the farmer. Watermelon, strawberry and apple producers were profiled in the sound books. The books were placed on Maryland's Best website, shown at the Produce Marketing Association trade show and in some grocery story chains. The images and sound are of high quality and it made an attractive promotional item.

### Advertising

#### *Radio*

"Maryland's Best" continues to purchase paid radio on various local stations to promote specialty crops and additional "Maryland's Best" activities. In FY 2008 radio spots were purchased in three major markets: Baltimore-Metropolitan, Washington-Metropolitan, and Salisbury-Ocean City. Since the "Maryland's Best" program was started, we've chosen a demographic of women ages 25-54 who have a good educational background, high household income, and children for the commercial radio stations. National Public Radio (NPR) stations are chosen based on their market location, as we've found that most listeners of NPR are more likely to buy locally grown items. In either case, paid radio has proved to be an effective way to convey "Maryland's Best" campaigns to our target audience and increase traffic to our website.

Promotion	Radio Station	Length (on each station)	Cume Persons*
Watermelons, August 2007	WWMX	1 week	179,140
	WYPR		125,700
	WAMU		114,400
Apples, September 2007	WWMX	2 weeks	179,140
	WYPR		125,700
	WAMU		114,400
CSAs, February 2008	WYPR		125,700
Wine, March 2008	WWMX	2 weeks	179,140
Berries, May 2008	WWMX	2 weeks	179,140
"Reach the Beach", June 2008	WWMX	1 week	179,140
Buy Local Challenge, July 2008	WWMX	2 weeks	179,140
	WYPR		125,700
	WAMU		114,400
Watermelons, August 2008	WWMX	2 weeks	179,140
	WYPR		125,700
	WWFG		67,100
	WSCL		21,000

Nursery & Greenhouse, September 2008	WWMX	2 weeks	179,140
	WYPR		125,700
	Q105		40,100

\*Cume Persons represents the total number of listeners per week, M-F

#### Station Information:

##### *Commercial Radio*

WWMX, Mix 106.5 – This station is one that “Maryland’s Best” continues to advertise with on a regular basis. It is the #2 ranked station for the Baltimore market. Seventy-five percent of the station’s listeners are women ages 25-54 and 52.7% have a household income over \$75,000. In addition, 49% have at least one child under eighteen.

WWFG, Froggy 99.9 - Clear Channel's WWFG "Froggy 99.9" is the top-rated station in the Salisbury-Ocean City market. It is rated both #1 overall and in adults ages 25-54.

Q105 – Dubbed the “family friendly station”, Q105 is ranked #3 in the Salisbury-Ocean City market

##### *Public Radio*

NPR stations represent a significant portion of “Maryland’s Best” radio. These stations are a useful way to capture a growing and unique audience. More than 29 million listeners tune in to NPR stations each week, up 29% in the past five years (Source: Arbitron Nationwide; Base: U.S. Adults 12+).

WYPR – In the Baltimore-Metropolitan area, 8,800 people tune to WYPR an average quarter hour period during the week, and the average listener spends 6.5 hours a week listening to the station. Generally speaking, WYPR listeners are conscious of eating healthy (listeners are 31% more likely to purchase organic foods), which makes them a key target for the “Maryland’s Best” campaign to encourage people to buy locally. Programming such as “Radio Kitchen” promotes buying local and eating healthy, and provides listeners with recipes for seasonal fruits and vegetables. “Maryland’s Best” took advantage of this during the summer of 2008 by sponsoring the show for three months.

WAMU – This station is ranked #2 for adults over the age of 25 in the Washington D.C. - Metropolitan market (during the morning drive). It also has the third highest market share among D.C.-Metro NPR stations during this time. Nearly 69% of the listeners are adults ages 25-54, and over 77% have a household income greater than \$75,000.

WSCL – WSCL and its sister station, WSDL, are two prominent NPR stations for Delmarva Public Radio. There are currently eight recognized stations in the Maryland NPR community, and WSCL is the only one that is located on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. This gives the station a prime market share for that particular area.

##### *Magazines*

MDA ran print ads for each quarter of Edible Chesapeake and bi-monthly ads in Maryland Life. Edible Chesapeake distributes approximately 155,000 copies annually through Whole Foods Markets across DC, MD and VA, advertisers, farmers markets and special events. The target demographic includes farmers, artisan food producers, restaurateurs, retail outlets and farmers market managers. Maryland Life distributes 360,000 copies annually. Distribution includes subscribers in the 23 Maryland counties, across the U.S., and in several foreign countries; the remainder goes to doctor’s

offices, news stands at supermarkets, bookstores, airlines, and special events. Their readership is 69% female ages 35 and older, 65% college graduates, and the average household income is \$137,000.

### Website

Maryland Department of Agriculture's (MDA) initial measurement of impact for the website was through "hits." MDA revised its methodology to measure the impact in 2008 from "hits" to "visits" to gauge the website's impact. From Dec. 30, 2007 to September 30, 2008, there were 18,733 visits to the site; 123,590 page views, and a 33.58 % bounce rate; visitors on an average spend 4.39 minutes on the Maryland's Best website. Our initial goal was to receive 16,000 visits. We did not set specific goals for pageviews, bounce rate or time spent on the website. We monitor this information monthly to determine the usage of Maryland's Best website.

## **Lessons Learned**

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Maryland specialty crop growers are uniquely positioned to benefit from the growing preference for local and regionally-based food systems. Historically, agriculture in Maryland had moved away from the production of specialty crops, particularly fruits and vegetables, which are poised to benefit the most from the demand for local, healthy products. With improved transportation and access to labor and irrigation, significantly increased competition from other regions of the nation and the world had reduced the natural advantage enjoyed by Maryland farmers. The demand for local is now leading Maryland farmers to reconsider the opportunity available to them in specialty crop production.

Many of the producers benefiting from Maryland's Best's promotions operate small family farms. The advertising and increasing public awareness of the availability of local specialty crops has the long-term potential to create new opportunities and new markets for them. Maryland's Best advertising is doing its job, and our campaigns have been very successful. With each promotion the MDA runs, there's an increase in visits to the Maryland's Best website (as shown in Google analytics). This proves that our efforts are paying off and that the advertising truly does help promotion Maryland agriculture.

Significant challenges remain for the foreseeable future. Will the demand to "buy local" continue? Food safety concerns will need to be addressed; costs of production and access to labor will continue to be a limitation for potential growth. Compared to the promotion and marketing directed at Maryland consumers from every potential source, the promotion and advertising conducted under this program remains tiny, limiting its success. However, every attempt is made to leverage these promotions through interaction with media, chainstore buyers and the growing "foodie" community.

## **Conclusion**

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The projects conducted with the assistance of the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant program have helped increased the awareness and consumption of Maryland's specialty crops. Direct sales can be attributed as a direct result of the promotion strategies.

## Contact

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## Modified Maryland's Best® Logo

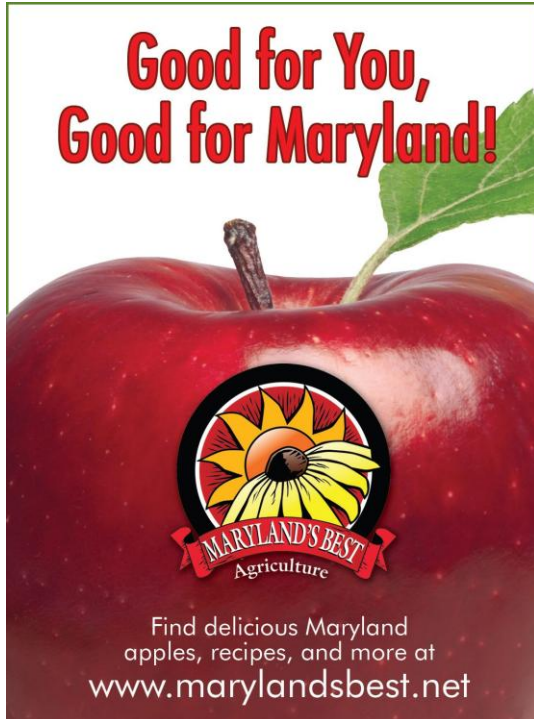


## Examples of Print Media





## Examples of Print Media



# Maryland's Best Brochure

*Now you don't have to wait for the best that's yet to come.*



**With Maryland's Best, it's already here.**



**MARYLAND'S BEST**  
Good for You, Good for Maryland  
[www.marylandsbest.net](http://www.marylandsbest.net)

Martin O'Malley  
*Governor*

Anthony G. Brown  
*Lt. Governor*

Roger L. Richardson  
*Secretary of Agriculture*

Earl F. Hance  
*Deputy Secretary of Agriculture*



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**MARYLAND'S BEST**  
Good for You, Good for Maryland



## MARYLAND'S BEST

*Good for You,  
Good for Maryland*

From fruits to vegetables, dairy to meats, direct to wholesale, you'll find it through Maryland's Best ([www.marylandsbest.net](http://www.marylandsbest.net)), a guide of who, where, what and how to "find and enjoy" Maryland foods.

By purchasing Maryland grown products, you're provided with goods that are fresh, local and delicious. And not only is Maryland's Best good for you, it's good for Maryland and our farmers.

Marylanders are interested in buying locally grown farm products. The 2007 Policy Choices Survey by the University of Baltimore Schaefer Center for Public Policy found that 76% of Marylanders are more likely to buy produce that is identified as having been grown by a Maryland farmer, up from 57% last year. 48% say they are willing to pay at least some premium for farm products that would support Maryland farmers.

Support local farmers, growers, food producers, packers, processors, distributors, grocers, restaurateurs and everyone else who makes it possible for you to enjoy Maryland's Best. Visit [www.marylandsbest.net](http://www.marylandsbest.net) to find out more.



### What's Available

#### Fruits

PRODUCE	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Apples									
Asian Pears									
Black Raspberries									
Blackberries (thornless)									
Blackberries (thorn)									
Blueberries									
Cantaloupes									
Honeydew									
Nectarines									
Peaches									
Pears									
Plums									
Red Raspberries									
Red Raspberries (tart)									
Sour Cherries									
Strawberries									
Sweet Cherries									
Watermelons									
Watermelons (heavenly)									

#### Vegetables

PRODUCE	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Asparagus									
Beans (Green or Snap)									
Beans (Lima)									
Beets									
Broccoli									
Cabbage									
Cauliflower									
Corn (Sweet)									
Cucumbers									
Eggplant									
Garlic									
Kale									
Lettuce									
Okra									
Peas (Blackeye)									
Peas (Green)									
Peppers*									
Potatoes (White)									
Pumpkins									
Sauerkraut									
Squash (Summer)									
Squash (Winter)									
Sweet Potatoes									
Turnips									
Tomatoes*									

\*Includes greenhouse and other extending technology



Of Maryland's 6.3 million acres, more than one-third are devoted to agriculture.

There are roughly 12,000 farms in the State, with an average size of 170 acres.

Maryland farmers produce \$1.3 billion in commercial crops.

Maryland's Best is a program of MDA National Marketing section.

## Examples of Point of Sale Materials





## Photos from the field

